DEVELOPING A COLLEGE READINESS SKILLS PROGRAM AIMED AT IMPROVING

SELF-EFFICACY FOR FOSTER YOUTH IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

By

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Abstract

The proposed work focused on the development and feasibility of a project aiming to introduce college readiness skills to youth who were in the foster care system in order to increase their perception of self-efficacy in an educational setting. With this increase in self-efficacy, foster youth who are generally disadvantaged when attaining and completing a college degree can have the skills necessary to combat this barrier. The project involved the development of contents of the program and the procedures performed at Bamboo Sunrise Foster Care Agency, where this Capstone project was carried out. Participants in the program consisted of three adolescent females who lived with a foster family represented by Bamboo Sunrise. The outcome of this project focused on the quality and feasibility of the program at Bamboo Sunrise, which was determined through utilization of a quality improvement feedback questionnaire that foster youth participants and staff at Bamboo Sunrise provided input on. Results from participant and staff feedback suggested that although parts of the program, mainly the arts and crafts activities, novel coping strategies, and skills targeted were enjoyable and beneficial for participants, much of the content could be simplified and made more generalizable for those with more difficulty with understanding the more complex concepts.

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Introduction

The subject of this capstone project was to develop and determine the feasibility of a college readiness skills program for foster youth in improving their perception of self-efficacy in academic settings. This program focused on providing foster youth with practical skills such as time management, organization, and problem solving strategies with the addition of mental health focused strategies needed to cope with the increased stress that can be present in an academic setting. Feasibility of the program was determined through how well participants received the contents of the program and how well the program aligned with the facility's processes. The specific population, intervention, and outcome (PIO) question is phrased as "Is a college readiness skills program for foster youth aimed at improving perceived self-efficacy in academic settings feasible?" The project focused on development and quality improvement of a proposed program with a foundation based in Occupational Therapy (OT) that aimed to introduce skills to foster youth that they would need for higher education.

"Foster youth" in this project were considered children from the age of 12 to 18 who were in the foster care system. At age 12, youth generally are considered to be maturing into adolescents where they begin to experience more complex and logical ways of thinking (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, n.d.). With these cognitive developments in mind, youth generally could begin thinking of more abstract aspects, such as their future after high school, at this stage of development (Stanford Medicine Children's Health, n.d.). Foster youth who reach age 18 are considered legal adults and usually transition out of the foster care system. They can be considered a vulnerable population, with children who were in the system facing higher instances of trauma, abuse, and neglect that lead them to be at risk for a multitude of behavioral and mental health issues. This, among other factors, created challenges and barriers for this

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population when pursuing or completing a higher education that their non-foster care peers generally do not experience as frequently (Hogan, 2018; Tobolowksy et al., 2019; Unrau et al., 2012).

The "college readiness skills" in question were defined as practical or soft skills such as problem solving, time management, and organization which form the basis of the program, but mental health strategies for coping with stress were also incorporated. "Self-efficacy" referred to perceived feelings of confidence and competence in these skills by the foster youth. Because this project was primarily focused on program development and on determining feasibility of the program, this outcome was actually be measured in this project. For the purpose of this project, the terms "college" and "higher education" were used interchangeably to mean any post-secondary (after high school) education. This included community colleges, universities, or trade and vocational school programs.

Significance to OT

There was a great need for a community-based OT program focusing on educational attainment for foster youth in preparing them for challenges in academic settings. OT practitioners strive to promote occupational justice that facilitates "inclusive participation in everyday occupations for all persons in society, regardless of age, ability, gender, social class, or other differences" (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], n.d.). According to the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework- Fourth Edition (OTPF-4; AOTA, 2020), interventions within the scope of occupational therapy, such as transitional services, life skills, and educational attainment are necessary for all populations. OT also has a deep-rooted history in serving the community through involvement and creation of settlement houses in the late 1800s and early 1900s that were meant to offer resources, education, and guidance to those in

impoverished urban areas (Creek & Allen, 2023). Although foster youth are a vulnerable and disadvantaged population that face a number of life challenges and traumas, they still need to be afforded the same opportunity as other youths to pursue their desired occupations, activities, and life goals.

An OT-based community program for foster youth could benefit a vulnerable population that is at risk of some of the most challenging life situations and circumstances that impact their overall health and wellbeing. An OT-based program should take a holistic perspective that would target practical skills and related mental health factors necessary to succeed in a higher education setting. Education offers multiple avenues towards different life paths that individuals can benefit from, whether it be achieving a career dream goal or gaining financial stability. If foster youth could be successful in a meaningful occupation such as education, this would allow for greater future opportunities in desired careers or life paths. These opportunities and a promotion of occupational justice allowed for foster youth to be able to participate in the occupations and activities that they desire in their lives effectively. It was with hope that this program would allow OT services to become more prevalent for this population in the local Las Vegas area and allow the profession to expand into more community service-centered roles in addition to the more commonly seen roles in the medical setting.

Literature Review

The following was an in-depth literature review that analyzed available research regarding the population of foster care or those similar to it, such as urban youth, and the link between this population with educational attainment and success. Particularly, the barriers that this population faced when obtaining and completing higher education have been highlighted. Existing programs that aimed to prepare urban or foster youth for higher education were also explored, as were individual interventions and strategies that showed promising results for benefiting students in attaining adequate knowledge and skills that help them prepare for higher education.

Benefits of Higher Education

Higher education presents as an opportunity towards a brighter future, a desired career path, and financial independence amongst other benefits. Adolescents are a population that are generally viewed as preparing for and looking forward to some form of higher education. For children in foster care, who have lived through traumatic and challenging life situations, a new opportunity that offers them independence and a more positive life path can possibly be especially valuable to them (Avant et al., 2021). The opportunity to be financially independent and follow a stable career path can be important for individuals who have not had that stability in their past and many foster children do hold aspirations for attending and completing a higher education (Avant et al., 2021; Chan, 2016; Ma et al., 2016).

Barriers to Higher Education

Adolescents in foster care face a number of challenges in their lives, with higher instances of child abuse, neglect, and trauma among this population leading to diagnoses such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues

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(Berardi & Morton, 2017; Morton, 2018). It has been found that foster youth who face these issues are more likely to experience academic challenges and even suffer from mental or developmental delays more frequently (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Hogan, 2018; Morton, 2018). Thus, this population is predisposed to begin their higher education experience with pre-existing mental and behavioral health issues that may lead to increased difficulties with college success. Notably, college students who experienced more than one form of abuse or childhood maltreatment are more likely to drop out of college and youth with a history of abuse are less likely to even attend college (Hogan, 2018; Morton, 2018).

The amount of children in foster care who pursue a higher education or complete a college degree is significantly lower compared to non-foster care peers due to issues regarding mental health and not having knowledge of the college system nor the skill set required to succeed in college (Avant et al., 2021; Morton, 2018, Tobolowsky et al., 2019). Avant et al. (2021) interviewed foster youth in college about their perceived opportunities and barriers regarding attending and navigating college, challenges arose due to a number of life circumstances, both environmental and internal. Some environmental circumstances were identified as factors to the challenges they faced, including limited supportive relationships from family, school, or caseworkers and instability regarding finances, housing, or employment (Avant et al., 2021). Internal factors that were more relevant to the individuals themselves involved personal issues regarding trauma, low mental health wellbeing, and low motivation (Avant et al., 2021; Hogan, 2018). Having a lack of knowledge, information, and skills required for postsecondary education were also internal factors (Avant et al., 2021).

Defining College Readiness Skills

There were a number of interventions and strategies that aimed to improve certain aspects and skills related to college readiness. However, various definitions of "ready for college" were used. Barnes et al. (2010) indicated that traditionally, high schools prepare students for college and life after high school through evaluating grades and assessing content knowledge of the subjects taught to students through standardized exams. However, other views posited that more practical skills such as problem-solving, time management, and organization are vital in order to be prepared for higher education (Barnes et al., 2010; Conley, 2007). Although some aspects of problem solving, time management, and organization are addressed in traditional high schools by having students turn in assignments on time and adhere to school schedules, they are not skills taught and explained to students explicitly (Barnes et al., 2010; Conley, 2007). Generally, no specific education in basic high school curriculums teaches students specific strategies for how to manage time or organize their schedules and goals efficiently. For students and youth who may need more in-depth explanations to understand some concepts, not having these topics and strategies described to them explicitly does not allow them to fully comprehend or incorporate these strategies into their skillset.

Existing Programs and Mental Health Considerations

Current available literature featured some college readiness programs that address skills such as problem-solving, time management, and organization using coaching and mentoring strategies (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). They have been shown to have some tentative, yet positive effects on the participants regarding feeling prepared and confident for college (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). However, very few of these programs addressed mental health wellbeing needs in their programs even though foster students usually identify mental health issues as being one of

the biggest challenges they face while in college (Morton, 2018). Häfner et al. (2015) offered insight about the mental toll that can accompany higher education, reporting that 75% of a sample of 212 community college students perceived some form of moderate stress, and 13% perceived some form of high stress. This was among the general student population and, therefore, it was not known how many of the students polled had a history of trauma, mental health illnesses, or a background in foster care. Even among students who might not possibly have a deep history of mental health challenges, higher education could be stressful. For foster youth who might be beginning their higher education journey with more mental health barriers and trauma than the general population, school could be even more challenging in this regard (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Hogan et al., 2018). This has made it even more pertinent to address mental health and stress among populations such as foster youth who may be more susceptible to struggling with these issues due to their background and experiences (Hogan et al., 2018).

Only one program for former foster youth, Better Futures, addressed mental health needs in their program (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). However, the program was delivered through providing resources and utilizing traditional counseling or talk therapy. Given the backgrounds of individuals from foster care, trauma and mental health challenges were very common among this population. Mental health challenges could interfere with daily activities and occupations, educational participation being only one of them (Hogan, 2018). Therefore, it is important to practice trauma informed care with foster youth (Berardi & Morton, 2017). Trauma informed care consists of service providers taking into consideration the traumas that their clients have faced in the past when interacting with or providing a therapeutic service to them (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Beyerlein & Bloch, 2014). This could be done in order to make the services provided more appropriate for their clients (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Beyerlein & Bloch, 2014).

Considering this, foster youth's mental wellbeing is important to take into account as a factor of their success in higher education and, thus, could be incorporated into a program that focuses on providing them with the skills necessary to be successful in that environment, as well.

Utilization of Peer Mentors

Peer mentoring and role modeling may benefit foster youth in improving self-efficacy (Bruster & Coccoma, 2013; Kirk & Day, 2011). Bruster and Coccoma (2013) as well as Kirk and Day (2011) examined the efficacy of interventions that featured mentoring and role modeling for foster youth. These programs involved former foster youth leading the educational process and learning sessions and working with the foster youth. Both studies concluded that the use of former foster youth as mentors and role models had a great impact on foster youth participants. In particular, it allowed these youth to learn from other individuals' experience who were once in the same situation and achieved success in higher education. Open dialogue and seeking advice on overcoming barriers were perceived as a source of inspiration and motivation for the youth participating in the programs (Bruster & Coccoma, 2013; Kirk & Day, 2011). Former foster youth can be a useful component to be incorporated in a program focusing on benefitting foster youth's self-efficacy.

Interventions and Strategies Targeting College Readiness Skills

This section explored the effectiveness or efficacy of programs or interventions targeting three different areas of skills identified as key components in previous college readiness programs for higher education (Chiang & Lee, 2016; Geiger & Beltran, 2017; Häfner et al., 2015; Henriksen & Shack, 2020). The skills involved problem-solving skills, time management and organization skills, and skills for improving mental wellbeing. Skills focused on mental

wellbeing were being incorporated to account for mental health challenges frequently faced by foster youth.

Problem-Solving Skills

One strategy to improve problem-solving was identified from the literature, particularly, project-based learning (PjBL) for students. PjBL is an approach to learning where students demonstrate their understanding of knowledge through the construction of a central "project" or physical "artifact" (Chen & Yang, 2019; Kokotsaki et al., 2016). The primary focus of PjBL is that the students' knowledge culminates in an end product that they had to plan and utilize a wide array of skills to create (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). One of these skill sets was problem solving which consists of being able to ask and refine questions, identify problems, communicate together in groups, explore and consider different views, analyze situations, plan effectively, re-consider strategies, and draw conclusions (Chiang & Lee, 2016; Chen & Yang; 2019; Guo et al., 2020; Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

PjBL. PjBL is an approach designed to enhance students' understanding of content through application (Chen & Yang, 2019). Applying PjBL, the learners have to put effort and thought into creating a product that represents their understanding of a topic and being able to adequately explain how it relates to learned knowledge. This requires more critical thinking and promotes a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Chen & Yang, 2019).

Chiang and Lee (2016) utilized a convergent mixed methods design to examine the effects of a PjBL program on motivation and problem-solving ability in vocational school students. The researchers found that, in addition to benefiting motivation, the PjBL program significantly facilitated problem-solving skills in their participants compared to the control group. Although their population was not foster youth, they were in the same age range as most

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foster care adolescents planning for their future and this intervention may, thus, be applicable to the adolescent foster care population.

     PjBL can be an effective tool to improve learners' performance. Guo et al. (2020) reviewed studies using PjBL with students and found a positive effect of PjBL on problem solving skills and other soft skills such as collaboration and teamwork skills. Chen and Yang (2019) conducted a meta-analysis to explore how PjBL affected academic achievement among high school or college-age students. They focused on the effectiveness of PjBL on academic achievement and concluded that, compared to traditional instruction methods, PjBL had a medium to large positive effect on academic achievement among students. Although problem solving skills were not the outcome of interest, it can be argued that students require some adequate level of problem-solving skills to be able to succeed academically. It can be tentatively inferred that problem-solving skills may have also been positively affected by PjBL in order for the students to demonstrate academic success. PjBL in regards to benefitting problem-solving skills seems to have moderate to high evidence, making it a viable intervention to utilize in order to facilitate problem-solving skills among students, and possibly foster youth who are also students themselves.

Time Management and Organization Skills

     Another important skill that many programs used to prepare youth for college were time management and organization skills. These skills helped youth navigate their school life in an efficient manner (Häfner et al., 2015). Students who practiced good time management skills were "able to complete tasks on time (such as weekly readings and assignments) and attend class, while maintaining social and work activities" (Broadbent, 2017, p.30). Having a clear, organized idea of how their day or week was structured allowed students to have an increase in "a

perceived control of their time and decrease in stress" (Häfner et al., 2015, p.91). Kirk and Day (2011) described a summer camp program on making college more accessible specifically to foster youth. The program introduced youth to organizational strategies such as goal setting and planning abilities. They reported that the program enhanced perceptions of ability in a multitude of life skills, one of which was time management.

Study Breaks. Utilizing and planning study breaks, a time management strategy, was shown to be beneficial for students (Albulescu et al., 2022; Biwer et al., 2023; Septiani et al., 2022; Zacher et al., 2014). One of the most common study methods was utilizing micro-breaks, or small breaks between study sessions, in order to recuperate and energize oneself (Albulescu et al., 2022; Zacher et al., 2014). Results from a systematic review and meta-analysis examining the effect of micro-breaks on wellbeing and performance by Albulescu et al. (2022) supported the role of micro-breaks for wellbeing; however, there was no concrete evidence for micro-breaks improving performance. The authors concluded that highly depleting activities may require more than a 10-minute break.

Biwer et al. (2023) delved into the differences between self-regulated breaks and predetermined, systematic breaks following the Pomodoro method. The Pomodoro method consisted of assigning a predetermined amount of time, usually 25 minutes, to studying and focusing on a task and then taking a five-minute rest break. After the five-minute break, another 25-minute focus and work session began. This was repeated for four cycles with the last cycle consisting of a longer 15 to 30 minutes break. Biwer et al. (2023) found that taking self-regulated breaks was associated with more distractedness and fatigue in university students, as well as lower levels of concentration and motivation when compared to a group that took systematic breaks utilizing the Pomodoro method. In addition, they observed that students who used

Pomodoro breaks exhibited seemingly better mood and task completion in a shorter amount of time (Biwer et al., 2023). Similar findings with regard to the effects of the Pomodoro method were reported to improve junior high students' focus and the quality in writing (Septiani et al., 2022). There was supportive evidence of utilizing planned, systematic breaks in improving focus and efficiency in college aged students while they work.

      Music in Breaks. Use of music was another way to utilize study breaks more efficiently and effectively. Moriya et al. (2018) investigated changes in brain and parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) activities when listening to music during a study break. They found that music had a relaxing effect, decreasing activity in both the brain and PNS in students aged 19-21. Incorporating a musical activity within a study break could, thus, potentially allow for more rest and relaxation during a study break compared to only resting or deep breathing techniques (Moriya et al., 2018). It would also offer a creative and enjoyable avenue of planning for and participating in study breaks rather than simply taking a break with only rest (Moriya et al., 2018). Adding music during break time could allow for an overall greater sense of enjoyment.

      Ito and Takahashi (2020) compared different types of study breaks and their effects on learning in university-level students. The students were required to solve as many mathematical problems as possible within 15 minutes with a three-minute break. Music was included as a strategy for a "quiet break" category. They reported that the results of students' performance on the questions showed that those who experienced music felt more refreshed and their concentration improved, although performance declined (Ito & Takahashi, 2020). The time constraint given for students may have possibly contributed to students feeling more pressured and not doing as well on the questions than if they were studying on their own or had longer breaks. There was evidence suggesting that music served as an effective way to manage stress

and relax while possibly improving concentration through enjoyable time management strategies.

Use of music during break time may also improve concentration. Rees et al. (2017) compared different types of breaks during a simulated operator activity where participants had to control a railway path to change the route of a misrouted train from one track to another. The study explored response times and how five different types of breaks impacted the latency period in reaction times. Music breaks were shown to be one of two breaks (of the original five) that decreased the latency period in response time, allowing participants to react faster to switching railways. These studies showed that utilizing breaks could be beneficial and incorporating music into one's breaks may have additional benefits to students' state of concentration and emotions.

Physical Activity in Breaks. In addition to music, study breaks can be enhanced with strategies such as physical activity. In an experimental study by Blasche et al. (2018) involving university students, they found that exercise breaks increased vigor and decreased fatigue compared to students who took breaks that did not involve any structure or physical exercise. Similarly, although with a much younger population of students in the fourth grade, a pretest posttest design with a control group by Müller et al. (2021) concluded that, compared to the control group that received breaks with no instruction, those who received structured breaks, including physical activity, showed improvements in attention. Other studies highlighted the importance of incorporating physical activity breaks into classes, both for university level students and younger students in elementary and middle school, in order to improve class enjoyability, student well-being, cognitive functioning, and even emotional intelligence (Koulanova et al., 2018; Muñoz Parreño et al., 2021). Although these studies focused on the importance of breaks during class time and not during a study break, the two environments could

potentially be comparable as students are generally engaging in mentally challenging tasks during both class time and when studying on their own, thus, requiring a break from their tasks.

Gamification of Breaks. Another strategy of gamification that incorporates gaming elements or mechanics into non-gaming activities, tasks, or environments could be employed to engage and motivate student learners (Browne et al., 2018; Edwards & Li, 2020). This usually involves incorporation of points and rewards systems, levels, rewards, or leaderboards. These strategies could serve to give continuous feedback to users while also making the activity competitive and allowing them to benefit with a reward (Buckley & Doyle, 2014). Buckley and Doyle (2014) conducted a pre-post study examining the effects of a group decision making system that was gamified and provided to students. They reported that there was a generally positive impact of the intervention. Although this intervention was not focused specifically on time management skills, rather decision-making skills, it provided insight on how gamified interventions had an impact on student participation and learning, especially for students who were extrinsically motivated. This presented a limitation for those youth who may not be as extrinsically motivated and other strategies more appealing for intrinsically motivated individuals may have to be utilized to engage them further, instead.

Utilization of Planners and Goal Setting. Utilization of planners and goal setting can be another strategy for time management. Many times, these two strategies can be used simultaneously because planners generally focus on allowing students to set goals, deadlines for events or assignments, and reminders for them (Dobronyi et al., 2019). Handoko et al. (2019) described university student performances in online courses that students utilizing goal setting and other time management techniques succeeded more in completing the online courses than those students who did not. A similar study by Broadbent (2017) who compared students'

learning strategies with their academic performances concluded that time management strategies, such as utilization of weekly planners, was one of the most important factors for grade outcomes. However, a large-scale field experiment by Dobronyi et al. (2019) found that there was no statistical significance of goal setting affecting the academic achievement or GPA of first year college students.

The differences among literature could be due to a number of factors, such as differences between online course and in person course skill requirements. These differing course formats may require different skills, commitments, or planning strategies (Durnalı et al., 2022). Another limiting factor relevant to the target population of foster youth was the issue of reward impulses in youth (Dobronyi et al., 2019). Dobronyi et al. (2019) discussed that younger people are more inclined to quicker and more immediate payoffs to their work and, thus, were less likely to be consistent with goal setting and planning over a longer period of time. This could create issues with being consistent with and participating in time management strategies, but nonetheless, honing these skills suggests a good potential to benefit academic performance (Broadbent, 2017; Dobronyi et al., 2019; Handoko et al., 2019).

Mental Wellbeing Skills

The ability to cope with stress or other mental health related challenges, particularly in an academic setting, is essential. Mental health challenges are much more prevalent among foster youth and are important to address in order to foster greater functioning in an academic setting (Hogan, 2018). However, not many of the available college readiness programs addressed this issue. Mental health in an academic setting is vital to a student's success and should be considered when preparing them for higher education.

Mindfulness and creativity are some strategies to improve the wellbeing of young students (Henriksen & Shack, 2020). Mindfulness involves the process of being more aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and state of being. This allows individuals to better navigate their potentially negative thoughts and feelings in more psychologically healthy ways. Creativity can consist of different forms of expression or reflection of ideas, thoughts, and feelings; by finding alternate ways to express these aspects, it allows individuals to make sense of them and understand them in different ways (Henriksen & Shack, 2020).

Mindfulness. Multiple studies described the benefits of mindfulness-based activities or interventions across a wide population, including students and foster youth. A systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Pascoe et al. (2017) detailed different mindfulness interventions from 45 different Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs). They found that the effects of mindfulness can significantly lower physiological indicators of stress such as cortisol and blood pressure levels and heart rate. Many of the interventions consisted of activities such as meditation, visualization or guided imagery, and breathing techniques being conducted with very diverse populations (age, health status, race, etc.) (Pascoe et al., 2017). This suggested that the positively observed effects of mindfulness were not limited to being effective with only small, specific populations, but rather could be applied to multiple, diverse populations (Pascoe et al., 2017). Additionally, the effects of mindfulness-based interventions, at least among university students, were found to have small to moderate effect sizes among 51 RCTs that were systematically examined in a meta-analysis (Dawson et al., 2020). The reviewed studies offered positive results for mindfulness based interventions and showed that they were overall beneficial, especially considering some of the populations involved were similar in age to foster youth (Dawson et al., 2020; Pascoe et al., 2017). A quasi-experimental study examining the effects of

visualization meditation on nursing students, where the participants were guided with relaxing imagery, and found positive results for achieving motivation and relaxation (Aksu & Ayar, 2023). The participants in this study were similar in age to foster youth who reported experiencing anxiety mostly due to academic stressors and experienced some positive benefit from the mindfulness intervention in question. Jee et al. (2015) investigated the effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction to traumatized foster youth. In this pilot trial, they reported useful insight on the youth's positive perspectives of the program and how it taught them useful coping strategies for their stress, showing that it was overall beneficial to the youth that participated. These studies illustrated benefits of mindfulness-based interventions for stress and anxiety among different populations and that these interventions could possibly be useful to incorporate into a program where a main focus is stress management.

Creativity through Art. Creative, art-based intervention was found to be beneficial to school age youth. Gunawardena and Stich (2021) systematically reviewed the literature and found that group interventions involving drawing and painting improved self-awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, increased feelings of optimism, emotional regulation, and improved sleep hygiene for youth aging out of the child welfare system. A qualitative study implemented by Lougheed (2019) focused on creative mindfulness and art-based interventions with youth aging out of the child welfare system and explored topics related to the participants' understanding and benefits of learning mindfulness. After participation in the program, participants experienced feelings of increased optimism, emotion regulation, and sleep hygiene (Lougheed, 2019). Coholic et al. (2023) explored the benefits of a mindfulness-based art intervention on students who were having challenges with school and reported improvements in self-awareness, self-judgment, thinking, mood, ability to make choices, social skills, coping, and

emotional regulation in the youth participants. Arts-based interventions facilitated focus, relaxation, and self-awareness for youth experiencing mental health challenges (Coholic et al., 2020). The positive effect of arts-based intervention suggested potential usefulness when incorporated into a program for foster youth that focuses on acquisition of adequate skills to cope with stress in a school setting.

Summary

Higher education can offer youth a myriad of benefits for their future. However, not everyone has the same level of access or preparation for higher education, as is the case with foster youth more often than not. Although multiple internal and external barriers to higher education exist for foster youth, there are some useful skills that can be introduced to this population for improvement, including problem solving, time management and organization, and mental wellbeing skills, to attempt to better prepare them for higher education. Most importantly, mental wellbeing considerations of the population should be emphasized given the important nature of trauma-informed care for the foster youth population. Through a host of strategies/interventions that incorporate these practical and mental wellbeing skills, youth would be introduced to them in a therapeutic setting aimed at improving their readiness for and perceived self-efficacy in higher education.

Statement of Problem

Foster youth face numerous challenges when pursuing and completing a college education. Common challenges such as mental and behavioral issues stemming from trauma are just one of the barriers for foster youth when accessing and completing a higher education (Berardi & Morton, 2017; Horton, 2018). Others include aspects such as financial challenges and lack of familial or social supports that non-foster youth generally have access to and benefit from (Hogan, 2018; Tobolowsky et al., 2019). These barriers further restrict foster youth's participation in their desired occupations and roles, including being unable to pursue and complete college at a far higher rate than their non-foster care peers (Avant et al., 2021; Morton, 2018; Tobolowksy et al., 2019; Unrau et al., 2012). Additionally, without the stability and opportunities that higher education can provide, among many other factors, many of the youth who age out of the foster care system are likely to face poverty, incarceration, and mental health issues at a far more increased rate as compared to non-foster care youth (Tobolowsky et al., 2019). With this in mind, it is clear that this population is generally not fully equipped with the skills needed to navigate these barriers and be successful in higher education.

There is a great need for programs that prepare foster youth for college, especially with an emphasis on mental health from the perspective of OT (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). This is currently limited in research evidence regarding OT interventions with this population, making it difficult to advocate for and provide OT services to foster youth on a larger scale. A college readiness skills program can be a beginning step towards developing more OT-based programs and interventions for this population, addressing both mental health and practical skills for this population. The anticipated outcome of the program is that foster youth participants will be able to better demonstrate an appropriate skill set preparing them more readily for higher education.

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop and determine feasibility of an OT-led college readiness skills program aiming at increasing self-efficacy of foster youth in academic settings. The accompanying hypothesis was that this program could be feasible to implement at Bamboo Sunrise Foster Care Agency, a local foster care agency in Las Vegas, Nevada. The anticipated outcome for ensuring development of the project was to identify and determine the skills necessary for the content of the program with the help and assistance of site mentors from Bamboo Sunrise. This was done through creating a detailed list of the content and activities to be included in each weekly session and approved by the site mentors. In order to meet the objective of determining feasibility of the program, the outcome was to obtain feedback from staff and youth participants at Bamboo Sunrise through a quality improvement feedback questionnaire assessing strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks chosen to guide this capstone project and program were the Person Environment Occupation – Performance (PEOP) model (Baum et al., 2015) and the Acquisitional frame of reference (FOR) (Luebben & Royeen, 2010). The PEOP model focuses on understanding the circumstances the participants are in due to internal and environmental aspects influencing their lives and their occupations, specifically regarding educational attainment and college readiness. The acquisitional FOR was the lens through which the program considered the participants' learning and knowledge or skill acquisition.

The PEOP model is composed of four components; the person, the environment, the occupation, and performance (Baum et al., 2015). The "person" component contains characteristics related to psychological, physiological, spiritual, motor, sensory, and cognitive factors. These make up an individual and their internal, personal functions. For example, the "person" aspect of a foster youth can be the possible psychological and cognitive effects from their prior experiences with trauma or any challenges that they have faced and how that has altered their views of themselves and their outlooks. It is important to take the "person" component into consideration, especially with this population because of their history in the foster care system and how that affects their identity and sense of self. People also tend to respond to trauma and challenges differently due to each individual's specific qualities or traits.

The environment is composed of cultural, social, institutional, and technological influences from contextual physical surroundings. The environment plays a large role in what is accessible and available to an individual. For foster youth, their environments can frequently change or be drastically different to most typical youth. Foster youth frequently experience healthy and/or unhealthy foster home environments, group homes, and many times even

homelessness. They are also a lot more likely to come from biological families of lower socioeconomic statuses or are not financially stable themselves, limiting their accessibility to certain institutions, such as higher education. Much of what they have they have to rely on their foster agency/caseworker or their foster families to provide for them. From the perspectives of the PEOP model, the practitioner needs to be aware of the current environment a foster child is experiencing and how it affects them, as well as what resources in their environment they have at their disposal to be able to thrive and succeed, particularly in an academic setting in this case.

The occupation is made up of characteristics of an activity, task, or role. There can be differing demands for different occupations that affect an individual's occupational performance (Baum et al., 2015). Occupational performance, in the case of this project with foster youth, would be educational attainment and success.

The three components of the model all interact to influence occupational performance. For foster youth, the PEOP model can be used to identify which components are affecting their aspirations and abilities/skills that allow them to feel prepared for college. Sometimes, a lack of confidence or knowledge (in the "person" component) may be dissuading them from pursuing a higher education, while other times the occupational demands of being a student may be too difficult (Avant et al., 2021; Tobolowsky et al., 2019). Other times, the environment and available resources for a foster youth can be their biggest barrier to attending higher education and being able to succeed (Avant et al., 2021). Many foster youth currently are unable to achieve educational attainment or succeed in higher education because they lack much of the skills needed (Person) and/or supportive systems (Environment) to succeed in that setting. If college readiness skills can be explicitly taught in an effective way, then their confidence and self-efficacy regarding being ready to attend higher education and feeling they will succeed could

possibly be improved. Therefore, occupational performance in educational attainment or success could possibly increase. It can be helpful to view all of these components together in order to better understand barriers and strengths that are present among foster youth when pursuing a higher education.

The acquisitional FOR was utilized to understand adolescent learning (Luebben & Royeen, 2010). The sessions within the program served to introduce the youth to new information and skills that they could incorporate into their everyday regular and academic life. The acquisitional FOR focuses on a teaching-learning process where specific skills are acquired optimally within an environment (Luebben & Royeen, 2010). In the case of this project, the college readiness skills were to be utilized in academic settings, more specifically a higher education setting. The emphasis within the acquisitional FOR is on learning new skills through utilization of reinforcement (Luebben & Royeen, 2010). These can be incentives and rewards that are age appropriate or even motivation through fun and stimulating activities; anything that reinforces learning and retaining information and skills for adolescents (Luebben & Royeen, 2010). This should be important for the foster youth population and taking into consideration effective strategies being used as reinforcement for learning the skills offered in the program and participating.

Methodology

The aims of the project were (1) to develop a program targeting skills needed to succeed in higher education for adolescents in the foster care system and (2) to determine the feasibility of a college readiness skills program at the Bamboo Sunrise foster care agency in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Agency

This Capstone project was conducted at Bamboo Sunrise Foster Care. Bamboo Sunrise is a foster care agency in the local Las Vegas area providing services to foster children and foster parents including case management, foster parent licensure, and therapeutic care among other services. Their mission states that they are "dedicated to the development and support of safe, nurturing families who promote resilience and permanency for children in [their] community" (Bamboo Sunrise, 2022). Bamboo Sunrise has strong values that coincide with promoting educational attainment among the foster youth that they represent. Thus, they were receptive to this program being introduced to the youth and the facility as it aligned with their organization's missions, vision, and goals. Additionally, they possess a healthcare clinic onsite that also aims to serve foster families. The services at the clinic are available to both the adults and children of any family, as well as the staff who work at the clinic and in the agency. The clinic was where therapeutic services, such as psychological counseling, were carried out and includes an emerging OT program, as well. Every child within the agency is required to have mental health counseling services consisting mostly of psychological counseling services with the onsite licensed clinical professional counselors (LCPC).

Target Population

The target population for this project was foster youth at Bamboo Sunrise Foster Care Agency. Inclusion criteria involved foster youth who were 1) registered within Bamboo Sunrise's system, 2) were between the ages of 14 and 18, 3) resided with a foster family, 4) were already receiving OT services at Bamboo Sunrise, and 5) were English speaking. Youth who were diagnosed with a severe developmental disability were excluded from the program due to the more complex nature of the content within the program. Youth residing in foster homes rather than group homes were preferred due to their more severe behavioral issues of youth in group homes, which could have potentially created issues with motivation and participation in the program. It was anticipated that at least five foster youth would be recruited to participate in the program. Although they were not the target population, staff from Bamboo Sunrise were consulted regarding perceptions of the program content. Those who worked directly with the children and their families (therapists and family managers, mainly) were prioritized in seeking their input due to their firsthand experiences with youth and their professional expertise. There were no exclusions in place based on years of experience or time employed at the facility.

College Readiness Skills Program

Content of the program was to be delivered at Bamboo Sunrise foster care agency through handouts and in-session activities. Content that focused on practical skills for youth when preparing for higher education was adopted in the program with consideration of mental wellbeing incorporated. Each session ranged from about 30 to 45 minutes and occurred once a week during the participants' regular OT sessions. The youth were asked to provide feedback on the program content and overall quality of the session after each weekly session was concluded

through a feedback questionnaire. A brief overview of the program's sessions schedule and content was listed as follows:

- o Week/Session 1: introducing time management/organization skills.
- o Week/Session 2: introducing mindfulness mental health strategies for coping with stress or anxiety.
- o Week/Session 3: promoting problem-solving skills through PBL activities with Fostering Scholars Q&A panel.

Time management and organizational skills addressed in the program consisted of learning effective time management and goal setting strategies and how to best utilize study breaks. Time management strategies were introduced through a handout packet (See Appendix A), including the Pomodoro method, a strategy to balance study and work time with needed breaks and relaxation. Participants were to be introduced to the method and provided with strategies on how to split up their time using alarms and mobile applications equipped with timers and in-app incentives/rewards. Strategies on how to use their break time efficiently were included, with utilizing relaxing or motivational music, as well as physical stimulation such as stretches and quick exercises. Utilization of planners/agendas was also a topic included, with different formats and layouts to be introduced to the youth. These layouts consisted of daily, weekly, and monthly planners with varying degrees of simplicity and complexity. Some more complex planners included boxes dedicated to assignments, goals, or a to-do list while others were simpler and left more blank spaces for the user to fill in themselves.

In order to make this topic more appealing to a younger audience and incorporate added aspects of creativity and mental health into the session, the participants were to create their personal music playlist for what songs they would include in their own study breaks as an

activity. They were prompted to choose music that relaxed them or was motivational to them. They were given their choice of a planner layout that they felt was most useful to them. A blank planner was provided by the Capstone student and was formatted as close as possible in the layout the participants preferred (daily or weekly, more complex or simple layouts).

The following session focused on art and mindfulness and was planned to allow them to decorate that blank planner as an activity. Participants were given the option of utilizing an existing planner they may already have had in their possession, if they preferred, but were responsible for bringing that planner to the next session. The session focused on introducing youth to creative strategies and activities to manage stress. They were provided a handout packet (See Appendix B) covering topics of meditation, body scans, guided imagery, deep breathing strategies, and the use of art and music in reducing stress and improving relaxation. The accompanying activities included demonstration of a deep breathing technique with an art activity focusing on deep breathing and stress management as supplement. The last activity of the session included painting and designing the covers of the planners based on their choice of preferred planner from the last session. This was completed during their study break with music playlists they created the prior week.

The last session of the program focused on problem solving skills. Problem solving skills were addressed through a handout packet (See Appendix C) and a PjBL activity as a learning experience while keeping it entertaining to an adolescent population since it included a hands-on art project (Chen & Yang; 2019; Kokotsaki et al., 2016). The PjBL activity consisted of creating a collage that incorporated at least two themes from the two previous sessions (time management and organization and mental wellbeing) that resonated with the participants. The visual had to somehow represent these themes and the participants were able to explain how the pictures or

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collage layout connected with the previous sessions' topics. They were given a variety of magazines and stickers to compile their pictures from. The activity aimed at challenging student participants in their understanding of the concepts from prior sessions and allowing for creativity and artful expression to further incorporate themes of mental wellbeing through the use of art.

The utilization of mentors who serve as guest speakers was a planned component to be incorporated into the program. Mentors were to consist of, at most, three students currently enrolled in the Fostering Scholars program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). The students involved in this program have had former experience within the foster care system themselves and are now involved in a higher education setting. Any current or previous students within the Fostering Scholars program at UNLV who had experience with the foster care system were deemed credible as volunteers to share their experiences. They were planned to participate in a panel, where questions the youth participants might have were posed with facilitation from the student researcher. Preset questions were to be utilized if there was a lack of questions and free flowing discussion among the participants and student mentors. These questions were to be provided to the student mentors prior to being approved to ensure they were comfortable with the questions and subject matter. Student mentors were to be utilized in the last session, allowing them to give their input on the current and previous weeks' subject matter and how they maneuvered through barriers and challenges they faced, focusing on what aided them in their journey to higher education.

Instruments and Data Analysis

As one of the main goals of this project was to determine the feasibility of this college readiness skills program at Bamboo Sunrise, information related to the feasibility of the program was gathered through a trial run of the program and subsequent quality improvement feedback

questionnaires. A quality improvement feedback questionnaire (see Appendix D) was provided to youth participants at the end of each weekly program session. They were given about five to 10 minutes after each session to complete the questionnaire regarding the topics of the session. The quality improvement feedback questionnaire focused on 1) how well the participants enjoyed that week's session, 2) any changes they feel could have been made, 3) what parts specifically did they enjoy, 4) if they felt it was a good use of their time, 5) if they felt it was applicable/relevant to an academic setting, and 6) if they felt they learned anything new.

Facility staff were provided another version of the quality improvement feedback questionnaire (see Appendix E) to gain their perspectives on 1) if this program was structured well, 2) if it was a good use of the youth's time, 3) if they felt it would be useful to the youth, 4) any proposed changes, and 5) if they felt it was realistic to implement at the facility and run smoothly. The staff version of the quality improvement feedback questionnaire was offered prior to the trial run of the program via email as well as physical copy to individual team member offices. Staff were provided with both verbal and email reminders to encourage responses throughout the duration of the Capstone project.

The questions within both of the feedback questionnaires were chosen in order to gauge general, perceived satisfaction and usefulness of the program among the participants and the staff at Bamboo Sunrise. Both questionnaires contained open- and closed-ended questions using a Likert scale to rank the enjoyability of the session or binary options as well. Descriptive analysis was employed to describe the participant sample and closed ended questions from questionnaires. Feedback from the open-ended responses was categorized based on each session and common topics found within the responses.

Ethical and Legal Considerations

Foster youth were considered a vulnerable population. Multiple considerations were accounted for through the duration of this Capstone experience and project in order to most optimally protect the participants from any harm the program may have brought to them. This Capstone project was recognized as a program development project rather than a research project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNLV (IRB #UNLV-2023-550). Parent/legal guardian consent (see Appendix F) for program participation was acquired prior to having the adolescents participate in program sessions. However, per Bamboo Sunrise Foster Care agency policy, because the program sessions took place during regular OT sessions with youth and families who were already giving consent to receiving OT services, no parental consent form was necessary. Verbal consent was obtained when the foster parents of the participants were first briefed on the program topics over phone call with the head OT and agreed to youth participation.

Additionally, the capstone student completed onboarding requirements for Bamboo Sunrise. This included an application, background check, and fingerprinting with the Department of Family Services (DFS) in order to be able to work with the adolescents at the facility. After approval from the facility and DFS, the student participated in Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) classes/training at Bamboo Sunrise once a week for three weeks in order to better understand the foster care setting and how to work with the children.

Information collected about youth was limited to demographic information including age, race, and sex/gender. Any formal medical diagnoses, behavioral issues, mental health diagnoses, or developmental delays were noted in the case that these diagnoses affected motivation or ability to understand the content materials. To ensure protection of personal information, HIPAA

guidelines were followed and private information was stored on a secure online document with password protection with only the student and the primary investigator, Dr. Chih-Huang Yu had access to the document.

Procedure

The capstone student conducted the Capstone project and experience at Bamboo Sunrise through three main phases: 1) assessing the needs of the population and facility and completing onboarding requirements for the facility, 2) participant recruitment and implementation of the program, and 3) evaluation for quality improvement of the program.

Initially, two needs assessments were conducted at Bamboo Sunrise. The student received initial permission from the facility director, Michael Flynn, to tour the main facility and observe the work environment. The capstone student observed facility procedures and workings to gain a better understanding of the foster care system. The second needs assessment focused on gaining staff perspectives on a potential college readiness program and challenges present within the foster care system and the facility. In this phase, the student completed specific requirements to be able to work within the facility and with foster youth (refer to the Ethical and Legal Considerations section for the details of these requirements).

The second phase involved participant recruitment and implementation of the program. The sampling process consisted of combined purposive and convenience sampling methods. The Capstone student collaborated with the head OT at the facility, family managers, and the team members at the reception desk to compile a list of all adolescents aged 14 to 18 years old within Bamboo Sunrise's system to initiate the recruiting process for the program. In order to obtain access to the youth and secure a viable timeframe to work with them, the sample was narrowed down to youth who were already receiving OT services and were on the OT's caseload. The

foster parents of viable participants were notified beforehand of the youths' participation in the program during their regular OT sessions through phone call communication with the head OT informing them of the session topics. Prior to program implementation, the capstone student consulted with and finalized the program content with the site mentor in regards to topics/activities appropriate to be included in the program. Three sessions focused on college readiness skills were conducted within the participants' regular OT sessions.

The third phase was the evaluation of the program through quality improvement feedback questionnaires. Staff provided feedback after reviewing the program contents. Staff were provided questionnaires before and while the program was taking place to complete the questionnaires and return them to the Capstone student. Foster youth participants completed questionnaires after each weekly session. Results of questionnaires were used to indicate feasibility of the program at Bamboo Sunrise through the participants' perceptions and improve the quality of the program for future use.

Results

Results focused on detailing participant perceptions of the program through the feedback questionnaires as well as the supportive perceptions about the program from staff at Bamboo Sunrise to determine feasibility of the program. Initial needs assessments and participant descriptions were also included.

Needs Assessments

Prior to the Capstone experience, an initial needs assessment was conducted at Bamboo Sunrise Foster Care Agency regarding the need for a college readiness skills program for foster youth at the facility. The needs assessment consisted of gaining a general understanding of Bamboo Sunrise as a facility and how it operates, with the student touring the facility and learning about the available services and professionals onsite. The director of Bamboo Sunrise, Michael Flynn, was consulted to acquaint the student with the situation and standing of the current foster care system. Information was gathered with regard to an in-depth description of the foster care system in Las Vegas, the challenges faced by foster care agencies (lack of funding and staffing), and their impact on care for the youth (lack of consistent and quality services). Information was exchanged related to potential OT services beneficial for the youth, with educational and career attainment, as well as life skills being identified as the main focus. There was an emphasis on overall trauma informed care regarding heavily incorporating mental health considerations in any work done with the foster youth as they have generally faced a multitude of traumatic events prior to being placed with a foster family.

A second needs assessment was conducted at Bamboo Sunrise at the beginning of the Capstone experience. This needs assessment consisted of a walking survey to gather perspectives from team members at Bamboo Sunrise about their perceptions of having a college readiness

skills program at the facility. Team members who were consulted included licensed social workers, the facility director and assistant director, family (case) managers, the head OT, LCPCs, and team members at the Qualified Residential Treatment Program/Facility (QRTP/F) that Bamboo Sunrise owns for some of the youth residing in group homes. During this needs assessment, the team members were first briefed about the aims of the Capstone project, shared their perspectives on a college readiness skills program, and described potential strengths and/or barriers within their facility in regards to the project.

A majority of the consulted team members suggested that the practical skills and mental health considerations included in the program were appropriate for the youth, as they have particular difficulty with some of these skills. In addition to indicating the importance of having the proposed program, consulted members suggested that many of the youth, particularly those at the QRTP/F who had more severe behavioral issues than those placed with foster families, may not be good candidates for the program. This was attributed to the fact that the priority for this subset of the population was to reduce behavioral issues that were considered as barriers for their success in academics and other areas of life. Other challenges discussed were the structural issues of funding and staffing to the foster care system and facility. The understaffed condition of the many child welfare facilities has restricted resources to meet the needs and care for the youth. Consequently, it was noted to be difficult to provide specific, consistent, and quality resources and education to the youth. The results of the two needs assessments supported that there was a need and an opportunity for the proposed program to be incorporated into the facility's OT sessions in order to attempt to provide a consistent and quality resource to the foster youth focusing on educational attainment and preparation for higher education.

Participants

A list of all adolescents aged 14 to 18 years old who were living with a foster family within Bamboo Sunrise's system was recruited. In order to obtain access to a viable timeframe to work with them, the list was narrowed down to those who were already receiving OT services. Three participants, all adolescent females from the same foster home who were all receiving OT services, were recruited for participation in the program.

The participants were only available to work with once a week due to their involvement in another capstone project and scheduling constraints. Each youth participated in a one-on-one session rather than a group session as the program was originally intended. All of the participants had at least one mental health diagnosis as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Description

Participant (n=3)	Age and Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Diagnosis
1	14, F	Black/African American	PTSD
2	17, F	Asian	PTSD
			Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating and purging
			Adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood
3	17, F	White, Non-Hispanic/Latino	Generalized anxiety

Program Attendance

Session one regarding time management was conducted with all three participants separately and all of them were present for their OT and regular therapy appointments on the same day. The second session was postponed for all three participants for about two weeks due to missed appointments resulting from participants contracting illness from COVID-19 and from the head OT having to reschedule appointments due to illness. Only one participant completed the third session, as the other participants missed their appointments and there was not sufficient time allowed in the Capstone experience. Events occurred with the foster family, as well, with the family gaining three new foster children, which resulted in more family responsibilities and missed appointments. The results detailing foster youth's responses and perceptions about the program sessions were outlined in the following sections and a figure of the full responses in Table 2.

Session One

Most participants indicated a favorable perception towards the content of session one. All participants reported this session either enjoyable or very enjoyable and responded positively regarding the usefulness of the program for school and if it was a good use of time. However, one participant indicated that they had not learned any new concepts or strategies from the session. No recommendations for improvement were provided.

Session Two

All participants completed this session and reported a positive experience with this session regarding the enjoyability of the session and its usefulness. All participants identified the arts and crafts activities to be the most enjoyable components of the session and appreciated learning new calming strategies and ways to cope with anxiety. There was feedback indicating

that "breathing techniques organization" and "coping skills creativity" were areas to change; however, no further elaboration or rationale was provided.

Session Three

Only one participant completed this session. Their responses primarily highlighted the arts and crafts activity as being the most enjoyable component of the session and reported positively regarding enjoyability, use of time, usefulness in academics, and learning a new concept without further explanation or rationale.

Table 2: Participant Responses

Question	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
How enjoyable was today's program session for you?	1 – not enjoyable: 0/3 2 – somewhat enjoyable: 0/3 3 – enjoyable: 1/3 4 – very enjoyable: 2/3	1 – not enjoyable: 0/3 2 – somewhat enjoyable: 0/3 3 – enjoyable: 0/3 4 – very enjoyable: 3/3	1 – not enjoyable – 0/3 2 – somewhat enjoyable – 0/3 3 – enjoyable – 0/3 4 – very enjoyable – 1/3
Would you change anything about the session? Give a short explanation as to why you would like those changes.	"there is no changes it was fun :3" "No" "No"	"I would not change anything" "Breathing teqnics [techniques] organization copaing [coping] skills creativity." "No"	"Nawr [No] had a blast."
Were there any part(s) of the session you really liked? If yes, which one(s)?	"yes!" "Study bunny" "yes"	"yes it would be arts and craft." "the painting and stickers" "Paint"	"art and craft"
Do you feel the session was a good use of your time?	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 3/3	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 3/3	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 1/3
Do you feel the content and activities will help you in your school/education experience?	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 3/3	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 3/3	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 1/3
Do you feel that you learned anything new from today's session? If yes, please list one thing (activity, strategy, or topic) you learned.	No – 1/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 2/3 "Setting alarms setting aside time to shortly study and take breaks and motivations to do so." "Idk [I don't know]"	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 3/3 "how to cope with anxiety." "new ways to cope" "(picture of cat face) Meow claming [calming] strategies"	No – 0/3 Somewhat – 0/3 Yes – 1/3

Staff Feedback

Feedback was sought out from six staff members with four staff members completing the questionnaires. Two of the four staff members were a family manager (case manager) and a family manager supervisor. The other two staff members were therapists; an OT and an LCPC. Results regarding their perceptions of the program were outlined in Table 3.

Overall, respondents perceived that the program was very well structured and was a good use of the youth's time. Specifically, the skills presented in the program were perceived as appropriate for foster youth to learn as these skills were areas in which many of the youth were perceived to need improvement. These skills were perceived as being beneficial to foster youth regarding not only academics and education, but other areas in life. Additionally, the respondents indicated that the program could be feasible to implement at Bamboo Sunrise due to the skills addressed aligning with the goals and missions the facility hopes to achieve with its youth.

One area for improvement suggested was that the program could be simplified to make the content more understandable and more generalizable for the target population. The respondents highlighted the importance of simplifying the verbiage within the content to be appropriate to youth's current executive functioning levels. Some content was considered as heavily relying on participants' existing understanding, such as innate connections, emotions, planning, sequencing, or flexible thinking.

Table 3: Staff Responses

Question	Staff Responses
1. How well do you feel the program is structured?	1 – not well structured – 0/4 2 – somewhat structured – 0/4 3 – structured – 0/4 4 – very well structured – 4/4
2. Do you feel the program is a good use of the children's time?	No – 0/4 Somewhat – 1/4 Yes – 3/4
3. Do you feel that the content and activities within the program will be useful to the youth? Please indicate why or why not.	No – 0/4 Somewhat – 1/4 Yes – 3/4 "These skills fall well within OTs scope of practice, support Bamboo's mission and goals for foster youth pursuing higher education, and are vital/can be used in other areas of life." – OT at Bamboo Sunrise "Organization, time management, and mental wellbeing are all skills that a good majority of our teens could use further development in." – family manager at Bamboo Sunrise "I do believe this program and the way it is modeled will be very successful, however the verbiage/wording may be too difficult for younger kiddos to comprehend. It can be arranged so that even younger youth can understand; I personally feel that would be best." – family manager supervisor at Bamboo Sunrise.

4. What changes, if any, would you make to the program/contents? Give a short explanation as to why you would like those changes.	"A timeline/guideline of when to do each activity." – LCPC at Bamboo Sunrise "Some of our teens may not be willing to do the 'building a stress monster activity'. Many of our teens are very rigid in their thinking and may not be able to make connections to the benefits of the activity past just an art activity." – family manager at Bamboo Sunrise "As OTs we are flexible, so we can adjust content/sessions accordingly. The only thing to consider is the client's current executive functioning level. Some activities rely on a person understanding innate connections or having planning, sequencing, flexible thinking, etc. skills already." – OT at Bamboo Sunrise "I would love to see more information on emotional regulation and being able to identify warning signs within oneself." – family manager supervisor at Bamboo Sunrise
5. Do you feel the program is able to be implemented into the facility effectively. Please indicate why or why not.	No – 0/4 Somewhat – 0/4 Yes – 4/4 "These are universal skills for college readiness that can be applied to most people." – LCPC at Bamboo Sunrise "These are all skills that our families and teams try to teach and develop in our youth. Adding additional material and programs will only further their development and lead to better outcomes for their future." – family manager at Bamboo Sunrise "As we are implementing sessions into current OT sessions and all is well, I think it will be a great addition in the future, too!" – OT at Bamboo Sunrise "The main topics that all kiddos in our care struggle with are covered in the presentation to some extent and could easily be worked into a curriculum or possibly group therapy sessions for kiddos wanting to further educate themselves." – family manager supervisor at Bamboo Sunrise

Summary

Generally, participants reported an enjoyment of the art and craft activities provided throughout the program. There was an interest in using the mobile applications introduced in the first session as well as learning new coping strategies from the second session. Staff feedback illustrated the importance of targeting the skills included in the program and areas of improvement regarding making more complex topics within the program simpler and easier to understand for those with difficulty in emotional and executive functioning. A summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the program is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Strengths and Weaknesses of the College Readiness Skills Program

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Enjoyability of art and craft activities	• Some content considered too complex
• Learned knowledge of new coping strategies/skills	
• Skills targeted perceived as important and useful for foster youth	

Student Mentors

Although the use of student mentors was planned and initially agreed upon with the Fostering Scholars program directors, due to scheduling issues, they were unable to participate in the program. In any future implementation or extended trial run of the program, the use of mentors should be included and stronger efforts to reach out to the program directors should be prioritized for further potential benefit to the participants.

Discussion

The purpose of the project was to determine the overall quality and feasibility of the college readiness skills program. The results of the program suggested that although there were strengths to the program regarding the art-based activities, new coping strategies for the participants, and the skills targeted, there were areas for potential improvement regarding further simplification of content. Furthermore, factors such as scheduling, bias in the responses, and the small sample size, have made it difficult to determine whether or not the program was satisfactory to the foster youth population at large and if it was feasible to implement at Bamboo Sunrise. Nevertheless, the participants seemed to be receptive to much of the content and activities based on their behavior during the sessions and their positive feedback. Supportively, staff feedback suggested the strong foundation of the program in focusing on important skill sets the youth in their care need improvement with. The program showed very tentative indications of being beneficial for the foster youth in preparing them for higher education and possibly being able to be implemented in some form at Bamboo Sunrise.

Strengths

Strengths of this program included the arts-based activities, introduction of new coping strategies for the youth, and the targeted skills covered in the program. All three of the participants identified that the arts and crafts portions of the sessions were the most enjoyable. With this in mind, engaging foster youth in a creative and entertaining outlet could possibly increase interest and participation in the provided activities. Arts-based strategies can be useful as an intervention strategy because it was related to their meaningful occupations, thus making them more appealing and effective. Additionally, adapting the activities in the session based on occupations the youth identified as enjoyable may enhance the effects of the program.

Equipping foster youth with a multitude of strategies and skills are essential for coping with stress or trauma and building resilience. All participants reported that they learned a new coping strategy to improve mental wellbeing. It is important to expose foster youth to a variety of strategies so that they could find those suitable for them. Another identified strength by staff at Bamboo Sunrise was the integral skills covered by the program (time management and organization, mental wellbeing, and problem solving). These skills were the core around which activities and topics within the content were integrated.

Individual and Group Formats

Originally, the program was proposed to be delivered in a group format. However, because of scheduling challenges it was delivered in a one-on-one format. Although some youth may find this more comfortable due to not wanting to share their feelings or ideas with others, group format could afford more dialogue and opportunities for peer learning (Cepukiene et al., 2018; Nswonu et al., 2015). However, this decision should be dependent on the preference of the youth. On the other hand, being flexible and adaptive to fit an individual's needs and schedule can be considered a strength of this program.

Therapeutic Use of Self and Participation

Therapeutic use of self was utilized with more reserved youth to facilitate a more optimal experience. Therapeutic use of self involves using interpersonal skills to create a more meaningful relationship between a client and therapist (Solmon & Clouston, 2016). Program participants demonstrated a variety of personalities and interests and utilizing therapeutic use of self-enhanced relationship building with them. Relating to the youth and asking about their plans, interests, and goals while getting to know them proved to be helpful throughout the program. By building trust, allowing creative choices and opportunities in the sessions, and

communicating through appropriately timed questions and comments, participants became more comfortable. With more reserved youth and/or those who have challenges being open about their feelings and ideas, therapeutic use of self could effectively improve building rapport and participants' engagement.

Challenges and Limitations

Several challenges and limitations were identified with regard to the implementation of the program.

Motivation

Motivation to participate in a program geared towards college preparedness may be low in foster youth participants. This can be attributed to the youth's life contexts and situation within the foster care system. Some youth may have felt the program was not important or vital to their current life needs and, therefore, demonstrated low interest in engaging in the program. This was observed during the participant recruitment process when staff at Bamboo noted this in youth with more severe behavioral issues who were placed in group homes. The participants in the program were all placed with foster families and did not exhibit any overt disinterest in the program. Nevertheless, youth who reside with foster families may also experience some behavioral challenges and clinicians should be mindful about this and take needed steps to increase motivation for educational pursuits.

Scheduling

Scheduling weekly appointments with foster youth was challenging due to the busy schedule of the participants' foster family and unexpected events such as illness and new foster siblings entering the home. The foster care setting constantly encounters numerous changes and last-minute setbacks due to the busy and ever changing lives of foster families. The same foster

parents may be responsible for multiple foster children and/or their biological children, at times. Foster youth participants were oftentimes involved in other therapy sessions and after-school activities. These led to scheduling challenges for participating in this proposed program. Additionally, rapidly changing living situations for the youth may increase with youth possibly leaving a foster home, becoming adopted, or gaining new foster siblings in a home. These all were potential factors that could contribute to the disruption of the routines of day-to-day life for foster families. In the future these should be managed through continued reiteration of the importance of attending weekly OT and other therapy sessions. Continued and close collaboration with foster parents to find appropriate time is vital.

Time Constraints

The contents of the program were delivered in the span of a 30 to 45-minute weekly OT session in order to make the demands of participating in the program more readily accessible. The length of time was short and considered as a limitation to adequately provide the participants with informative and effective materials and activities. Some informative and education-based sections were covered quickly to allow time for application of activities. Even then, some activities were cut short, as well. Moreover, some of the content and activities may not have been carried out as effectively and as in depth as they could have been, which may have been less impactful to the participating youth. More close collaboration with the foster parents and facility to find more appropriate and fitting time slots to carry out the program sessions would be beneficial.

Response Bias

There may have been an issue of a lack of privacy for participants when filling out feedback questionnaires. No extra space that was provided for solitude. Moreover, since the

youth needed to be supervised at all times, they had to fill out the feedback questionnaires in the same room that the sessions were carried out in and in the presence of the capstone student and the OT. The presence of the student and the OT in the room may have influenced their responses. This is related to the Hawthorne effect where subjects will change their behavior or responses because they know they are being observed, acting or responding in a way they believe the observer or researcher wants them to. This might have affected some responses on the questionnaires, causing a majority of the responses to be positive in regards to the sessions except a select few. In the future, allowing participants alone time to complete the questionnaires or a more anonymous strategy of filling out the questionnaires with a larger sample size would be beneficial to acquiring more accurate responses and perceptions free of any bias.

Future Direction

Future implementation of this program should take the aforementioned limitations into consideration. More concentrated and vigorous efforts to collaborate more closely with both foster parents and facility staff is essential. More effort should be taken prior to beginning the program to find appropriate times for them to arrive at sessions and commit to longer sessions, as well. Rather than relying only on time provided within OT sessions, it could be helpful to collaborate even more in-depth with the facility director and reception staff to block off more time slots for the participants to engage in the sessions. Committing to longer sessions would need to be solved by gaining parent permission for the youth to stay longer than their appointment sessions ask of them. Providing an incentive or reward for staying 30 minutes longer could possibly assist with this.

The lack of private space can be combated through creating a more anonymous way to provide feedback. Completing the questionnaire online over an anonymous survey format at the

end of the session may be more appropriate. No personal identifiers such as handwriting would be a factor and they would not have to directly hand their responses to the student, alleviating any potential pressures in that regard. Another potential solution, if the facility policy allows, would be to work with facility staff and foster parents to receive permission in leaving the youth alone for five minutes in a private room to fill the questionnaires out and place them in a designated pile or area once finished. Allowing more anonymity and quiet alone time to complete questionnaires would allow the participants to be more truthful and to also more carefully consider the questions. A larger sample size could also benefit in providing more responses that better portray foster youth's perceptions of the program.

The content information should be simplified for younger youth or those experiencing executive function difficulties. It would possibly be beneficial to add more context within the contents to aid in explaining concepts such as flexible thinking, critical thinking processes, and emotional regulation in more depth and in more understandable terms for youth as well as younger children. Simplifying the language and explaining strategies or concepts in more depth would be beneficial for youth. Utilizing visual aids could further understanding of concepts.

Measurements of self-efficacy should be included in future implementation of program evaluation. Appropriate measurements include the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire for Children (SEQ-C), a valid and reliable measure that measures feelings of self-efficacy in youth (Muris, 2001) or the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI), a tool to analyze and measure a students' awareness and use of study/learning strategies (Kallison, 2017). However, these would have to be modified and reassessed for validity and reliability in order to target the appropriate self-efficacy related outcomes the program is focusing on.

The SEQ-C includes three categories; 1) social self-efficacy, 2) academic self-efficacy, and 3) emotional self-efficacy. For the purposes of this program, the academic and emotional self-efficacy sections should be included as they are more relevant to the program's content and goals. Statements within academic self-efficacy focus on a perceived ability to manage one's learning behavior, master academic subjects, and fulfill academic expectations (Muris, 2001). Emotional self-efficacy statements pertain to the "perceived capability of coping with negative emotions" (Muris, 2001). There are 10 categories within the LASSI: 1) anxiety and worry about school performance, 2) attitude and interest, 3) concentration and attention to academic tasks, 4) information processing, acquiring knowledge and reasoning, 5) motivation, diligence, self-discipline, and willingness to work hard, 6) self-testing, reviewing, and preparing for classes, 7) selecting main ideas and recognizing important information, 8) use of support techniques and materials, 9) use of time management principles for academic tasks, and 10) test strategies and preparing for tests (Kallison, 2017). For the purpose of the program and time benefit of the participants, the instrument would have to be modified so not every section would be included.

Summary

Although multiple challenges and limitations were present with this initial implementation of a college readiness skills program, future plans for implementation can benefit from this trial run. Minimizing the existing limitations and challenges can improve the perception of the program among foster youth and, subsequently, lead to a more overall effective program geared towards their benefit. One can expect that the program would show stronger indications of being beneficial for foster youth and, thus, more feasibly implemented at Bamboo Sunrise Foster Care. Although there are strengths to the program, currently, the large number of

limitations do not allow for definitive answers regarding satisfaction and perception of the program among foster youth and, therefore, its potential for feasibility at Bamboo Sunrise.

Implications for Practice and Research

The work with this vulnerable population in regards to educational participation as well as other challenging or transitional areas of their lives is needed. Foster youth can be severely overlooked during a highly critical transition point in their lives, such as aging out of the foster care system. This should be a time for them to guide their planning toward the future and strive towards their goals. With more OT involvement in education, more foster youth would have the means of achieving a higher quality of living in their future. Many foster youth require assistance in other areas of living that are within OT's scope of practice, as well.

Regarding research, this project sought to fill the gap in a lack of existing college readiness programs for foster youth from the OT perspective. The project and the program served as an initial effort towards creating more OT-based programs and requires further systematic examination through more rigorous research. The program in its current form needs to be reevaluated in regards to some of the content, planning, and data collection methods, but with those changes implemented, it can serve as a potential candidate for study on its effectiveness and provided benefits.

Conclusion

This capstone project was created to fill the gap regarding the lack of existing college readiness programs for foster youth with mental health considerations incorporated. The program aimed at introducing and teaching foster youth skills necessary for a higher education setting through increasing their perceived self-efficacy in said setting. The results of the project identified participant perceptions of the program and its feasibility at Bamboo Sunrise. Although participant and staff perceptions were generally positive, there were multiple limitations discovered that prevented a concrete answer about the program's feasibility in its current state.

This program was a tentative step forward in introducing increased OT-based interventions with foster youth in the local Las Vegas area, specifically in regards to their educational participation. Ideally, similar programs and research initiatives can be continued in the future in order to help serve this vulnerable population and allow them to participate in meaningful activities, achieve their goals, and successfully transition to a new stage in their lives.

Session One: Time Management and Organization Handout

Time Management and Organization

Session 1

Part I: Time Management

Study Breaks

Pomodoro Method: A technique that helps divide tasks into a 25 minute work cycle followed by a 5 minute period of rest. After 4 cycles, students can reward themselves with a longer break of 15-30 minutes. According to research, this method can help with productivity, focus, mood, and possibly even quality of work (Biwer et al., 2023; Septiani et al., 2022).

You can choose different time intervals that work for you if a 25-5 cycle does not work; some people do better with a longer work period and longer break (50 minute work period and 10 minute break) or a shorter work period of 15 minutes.

Study Time	Break Time
Cycle 1: 25 minutes of studying	*5 minute break*
Cycle 2: 25 minutes of studying	*5 minute break*
Cycle 3: 25 minutes of studying	*5 minute break*
Cycle 4: 25 minutes of studying	*15-30 minute break*

Please remember that this is just a method to guide you through your study sessions. If you go over 25 minutes of studying/working because you are in a good flow and feel like you can do another 5-10 minutes of productive work, then go for it! You don't have to feel pressured to stick to the method strictly 100% if it causes more frustration/stress.

Pomodoro Method

pick a task or tasks to complete

set your alarm

work on your task for a preset amount of time (25 mins)

take a break (5 mins)

take a longer break every 4 cycles

How to Plan Your Study Breaks Ahead of Time:

Create a list of goals before you start studying so that you know what you would like to get done by the end of your entire study session.

Try to be realistic with the goals you set and give yourself enough time. You do not have to feel like one 25-5 cycle should automatically be enough to complete one goal; you can use 2 or 3 cycles if needed to complete one goal.

- Ex: Here is how you can set your goals up in an easy format if you have to study for a quiz on certain chapters.
    - Goal 1: Read chapters 1-2
    - Goal 2: Finish notes/flashcards for chapter 1
   - Goal 3: Finish notes/flashcards for chapter 2

Depending on how long chapters are, you could read 2 chapters in 25 minutes or, if they are longer chapters, it might take another 25 minute cycle to finish this goal. As long as the goal is complete in the end, it should not matter too much how many cycles you go through to achieve it, given you have the time available.

Setting Your Pomodoro Timers/Alarms

You can use preset alarms on your phone to plan your work and break intervals. There are also multiple free mobile apps available that can give extra incentive to study while also timing your study sessions (Browne et al., 2018; Buckley & Doyle, 2016; Edwards & Li, 2020). Some of these are...

- Study Bunny: Focus Timer - Earn coins by timing your study sessions in order to buy items for your bunny. You can also connect with friends, utilize the app's to-do lists and flashcards, and track your studying over time.
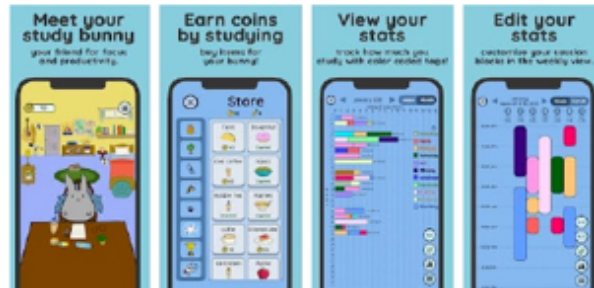
- Flora: Green Focus - Set timers and use app settings to minimize distractions and phone usage while studying. Earn rewards and discover new maps by completing study sessions. You can challenge yourself even more by using app settings to set a price if you give in to distractions and use your phone while studying (monetary proceeds go towards helping planting real trees in Africa) and gain rewards if you succeed and do not use your phone during your study session.

How to Make the Most of Your Study Break

A study break is time for you to decompress and relax. Although simply sitting and getting your mind off of the task at hand is good for you, you can definitely make your breaks more impactful to enhance your relaxation, lower any stress that is present, and improve attention for the next round of studying (Häfner et al., 2015; Häfner et al., 2014). Some ways to do this are to...

- listen to music that is soothing or motivating on your break (Ito & Takahashi, 2020; Moriya et al., 2018; Rees et al., 2017).
- do quick physical exercises/stretches (Blasche et al., 2018; Koulanova et al., 2018; Müller et al., 2021; Muñoz Perreño et al., 2021).

## Time Management Activity: Make your Own Study Break Soundtrack

For today's activity we will make our own study break soundtrack, personalized with your favorite motivational or calming music! You can use Spotify, Youtube, Apple Music, or any other music app/website like Pandora where you can search for music. You can also just use Google to search up songs if you want to view the lyrics or listen to it before adding it to your list, as well.

Choose at least 5-10 songs (or more if you can think of them, there is no limit).

The songs you choose will be played during next week's activity session so try to choose at least one or two songs that are appropriate and can be played for the group in the therapy room. The rest of your playlist is up to you to create!

Part II: Organization

Utilizing Planners for Goal Setting
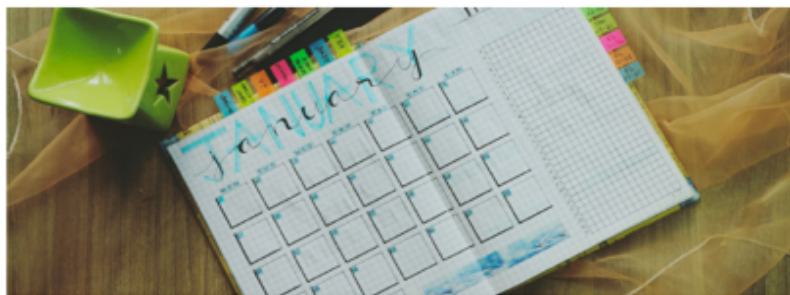
Planners are a great way to organize goals, tasks, and responsibilities over a period of time. Whether it is daily, weekly, or monthly goals and tasks that are being focused on, planners help you stay on track and be better prepared for deadlines.

Having an organized list of responsibilities makes them more visible to the student.

This makes it easier to adhere to study routines or goals and be prepared for assignments or exams that will allow you to achieve passing grades.

Make sure goals are attainable and realistic; set specific dates or times (by end of the week, by end of the day etc.)

(Broadbent, 2017; Dobronyi et al., 2019; Handoko et al., 2019; Sibley et al., 2013).

What Planner is Best for You?

There are numerous planners available in stores and online, all with different focuses or layouts. It's important to choose a layout that works for you.

Some planners will also be specifically geared towards students and their school schedule. Others are more general, being applicable to both academic and personal goals and tasks. Whichever focus works best for you and makes you feel more organized is your own preference and choice.

Daily vs. Weekly

Planners come in different formats, the most common usually being daily and weekly planners.

Daily planners are usually more specific to the schedule one has to follow on a certain day and will mark goals and tasks that are to be done at specific points in that day. They give structure to daily activities and help students plan their tasks throughout the day in detail.

Weekly planners are more focused on the goals and tasks done on different days in the week so that students can look at their planner and know what general goals or tasks to focus on on a given day. They allow the student to plan their weeks and be able to anticipate upcoming due dates or tasks easier.

Simple vs. Complex

If you prefer your goals and tasks listed simply, it may not be beneficial to get a planner with a layout that is cluttered with many boxes or prompts.

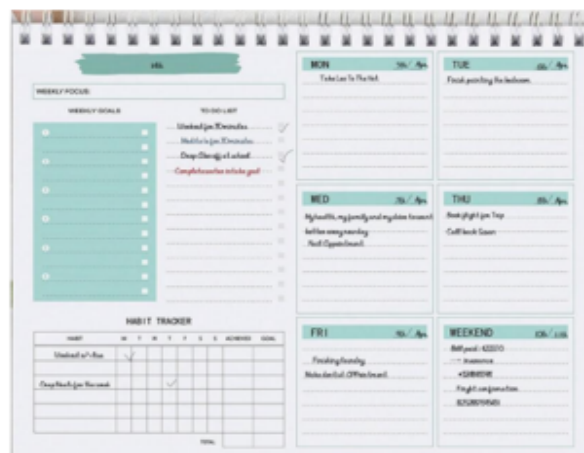Ex: daily, simple planners

Ex: weekly, simple planners

On the other hand, if you prefer a lot of structure and require a large amount of information in your daily or weekly plans, then planners with more options, boxes, or prompts on each page could be a better choice.

Ex: daily, more complex planners

Ex: weekly, more complex planner

Make it Fun

The idea of filling out a planner may seem boring and tedious, but there are ways to make it more fun and personalize it to your own needs and interests.

Color coding goals and tasks by different categories can be a satisfying way to practice your art skills while enhancing organization.

Creating a planner with your own cover design can also be fun (or, if you're not as creative, you can find planners online with appealing preset designs).

Please choose what template/layout you like best and for next week's session I will try my best to bring a planner that matches your preference so that we can decorate and personalize our planners during a mindful art activity!

Planner layout options to choose from:

- Daily Planner - simple
- Daily Planner - complex
- Weekly Planner - simple
- Weekly Planner - complex

Thank you for your time and participation and see you in the next session!

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Appendix B

Session Two: Mental Wellbeing Handout

MENTAL WELLBEING

Session 2

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the concept of being aware.

You can practice mindfulness by being aware of your own body, your feelings, your thoughts, the present moment, or your surroundings. Because we are so busy in our day-to-day lives, it can take a conscious effort to be mindful of these things and really consider them.

There are so many factors in our lives that can cause us stress and worry. Whether it is challenges regarding family, school, work, our futures, or finances too much stress can create a negative impact on us.

Some short and long term symptoms of high stress are outlined here:

- shortness of breath, confused/jumbled thoughts, feelings of unease, clamminess or sweating, fatigue/tiredness, general anxiety, and frequent negative or depressive thoughts.

(Pascoe et al, 2017).

That is why it is important to take aside some time and practice mindfulness when you can, especially when considering the benefits.

Practicing mindfulness can lead to...

- improvements in mood and emotional regulation
- increased self-awareness and self-judgement
- improvements in decision making and thinking
- increased focus and relaxation
- reduced physiological signs of stress like high heart rate and possibly even blood pressure

(Coholic et al., 2023; Coholic et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2020; Gunawardena & Stich, 2021; Lougheed, 2019; Pascoe et al., 2017).

The benefits of mindfulness affect many areas of your life positively in some way.

Being able to practice mindfulness allows you the skills to cope with both your personal and academic life challenges in a more positive and healthy manner!

How to Practice Mindfulness

There are different, easy ways to practice mindfulness every day. Some of these include...

- meditation/body scans
- deep breathing
- visualization/guided imagery
- utilization of art/music

We will go into more detail about these in the following sections.

Meditation/Body Scans

Meditations and body scans usually consist of a guided experience prompting you to focus on breathing, clearing your mind, or being mindful of parts of your body and your surroundings. They can be really helpful for calming down and unwinding after stressful moments or even before bed to help you get to sleep.

There are multiple mobile apps that also provide these guided experiences and will talk/guide you through the experience if you are not able to remember it on your own. They serve as a great tool to be able to participate in mindfulness in an easy way.

(Aksu & Ayar, 2023; Dawson et al., 2020; Pascoe et al., 2017)

Deep Breathing

There are a multitude of deep breathing techniques used and whichever one you feel most comfortable with should be your go-to.

Some are very simple, such as counting down from a number while slowly breathing in and out. Sometimes visualizing the breath you draw in and out and focusing only on your breathing is also helpful.

(Dawson et al., 2020; Pascoe et al., 2017)

Activity 1: Make your Own Stress Monster

For the first activity in today's session we will be using watercolor, straws, and our own breathing to make a stress monster.

This activity is a fun way to learn and practice deep breathing for relaxation while also creating an artistic visual of your problems and worries to be able to more easily understand it.

Materials that will be provided for you:

- a piece of paper, watercolor paint kit, straw (optional), a brush, markers, a cup with water, and stickers.

After you have all of your materials we can start the activity!

<u>Instructions:</u>

1. Follow a quick deep breathing instruction to get you familiar with the exercise
   ○ You can close your eyes, look at the ground, or keep them open while you do this activity. Do what is most comfortable for you.
   ○ Breathe in deeply through your nose and hold your breath for about 3 seconds (it can be more or less depending on what you are comfortable with).
   ○ Let your breath out slowly through your mouth and then inhale to breathe in again when you are ready.
   ○ Try to limit other thoughts and focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. Visualize it as it moves through you, being mindful of the way you breathe and how you feel.
2. Write down or think about 1 worry that you have been feeling (today, this week, the past couple of months, etc.). If you want to make another monster, you can write down/think of another worry, as well.
3. Choose a color to represent this worry. If you are doing 2 worries, you can choose a different color to represent it.
4. Wet the center of the paper with your brush + water.
5. Apply your chosen color to the wet spot.
6. Next, we will do the breathing exercise again, but this time with the paper held up to your face so that you can spread the paint with your breath as you breathe out. You can use a straw if you like for more accuracy in spreading the paint.
7. Once you have the general shape of your monster, let it dry for a bit and then put googly eyes on your monster. You can put as many eyes as you want, but leave some space as we will be drawing other things on the monster's face and body, as well.
8. Next, we will go over some prompts together. They will help you think about your worries productively and how to begin planning to resolve your worry while also decorating your monster.

<u>Decorative Prompts:</u>

How long will it take to solve your worry?

- <u>less than</u> a week = draw a hat
- <u>longer than</u> a week = draw ears/horns

Does this problem occur a lot or just once?

- Occurs <u>multiple times</u> = draw a sharp/triangular nose
- Occurred only <u>once</u> = draw a round nose

Do you know the steps/plan you need to take to fix the problem?

- <u>Yes</u> = draw a mouth with a tongue sticking out
- <u>No</u> = draw a mouth with teeth
  - (the mouth can be happy, sad, or whatever shape you want)

Have you already tried to solve this problem?

- <u>Yes</u> = draw legs and a hand doing a peace sign
- <u>No</u> = draw arms and legs with shoes on
  - you can draw as many arms or legs as you want

Can you solve this problem with help from someone else?

- <u>Yes</u> = draw long hair
- <u>No</u> = draw short hair

Your stress monster should look something like this:

Take a moment to think about your stress monster and the problems that it consists of. Just being mindful and really thinking of the components of a problem can be helpful to some people in figuring out a good way to go about reducing or solving the problem. It is also ok to not have a current plan. Practicing mindfulness and thinking about the issue is a great first step, regardless.

You can share with each other how your monsters look and compare and contrast if you would like.

<u>Visualization/Guided Imagery</u>

Visualization or guided imagery involves creating and focusing on mental images or settings, usually as a relaxation technique. This can probably be easiest to do by having guided prompts or sessions to help you create relaxing and comforting mental images.

Many prompts ask you to think of somewhere you feel the most at peace or safest and then will go more in depth regarding the details of your mental image. This allows you to create the image as you are provided new prompts and focus on the image's details like colors, temperature, or objects in the image.

(Aksu & Ayar, 2023; Pascoe et al., 2017)
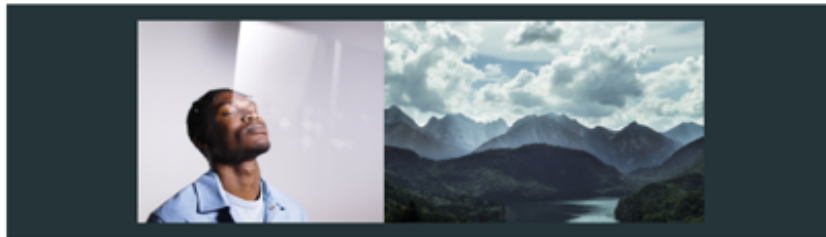
There are multiple apps that do provide guided imagery sessions, but many of them are not free and require monthly payments. However, there are a variety of guided imagery sessions available on YouTube for free. This might be a more convenient option to access, as well, as you do not have to make an account to access these videos. However, here is a list of some of the previously mentioned apps, if you do want to utilize them. Some do have a limited amount of free content available, as well.

- Simple Habit
- Lumenate: Explore & Relax (requires owner of account to be 17+ years old)
- BetterSleep: Relax and Sleep
- Breethe: Sleep & Meditation
- The Mindfulness Meditation App

Art and Music

Listening to music and participating in art activities can be a good way to relax and practice mindfulness in a creative way.

Calming or upbeat music can help us feel at ease, motivate us, or simply give our minds a rest from thinking.

Art is also a great medium to focus on something other than your problems or stressors and hone in on a fun, productive project.

Coholic et al., 2023; Coholic et al., 2020; Gunawardena & Stich, 2021; Henriksen & Shack 2020; Lougheed, 2019).

Activity 2: Decorate your Planners to your Soundtrack

For the rest of the session you can work on decorating your planner while we play some of the music you chose to include in your study break soundtracks last week!

Paints, markers, colored pencils, and stickers will be provided for you to work with.

Focus on the art you are creating or the music and lyrics and how it makes you feel.

Have fun and we can share what our planners look like afterwards if you are comfortable!

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Appendix C

Session Three: Problem Solving Handout

Problem Solving

SESSION 3

Problem Solving Process

When confronted with a task or challenge, first think about and identify the problem or task at hand. Understanding the task allows you to see all components of it to then be able to formulate a plan for how to tackle the issue.

Think about the tools and materials at your disposal and how they would help you accomplish your task. Have a general idea or outline of how you will go about solving your issue or completing your task.

Being able to sequence your plan and knowing what steps to take will make the process easier overall.

(Chen & Yang, 2019; Chiang & Lee, 2016; Guo et al., 2020; Kokotsaki et al., 2016)

If you are in a group and need to problem solve through a task, discussing initial ideas and strategies is helpful. Find a solution that can be agreed upon with all members.

Also take into consideration who would be best in what position and then delegate work as is most efficient. Constant communication and teamwork is important in a group. It is helpful to voice your thought process to your peers and encourage them to do the same so that you are all on the same page.

No matter what path you take in life, working with others is almost a sure thing. Group projects and assignments in both school and work are going to require you to be able to work well with others.

Take into consideration others' ideas and opinions and be open-minded! You have to think of others as your teammates working towards the same goal rather than bothersome barriers.

(Chen & Yang, 2019; Chiang & Lee, 2016)

You also need to be adaptable and constantly analyze and re-analyze the situation or task at hand to be able to complete it successfully.

Just because your strategy is going well at the moment does not mean you may never come across another challenge or barrier. When this does happen, you should try to re-analyze the task and identify what needs to be changed and then try to implement that change as best as you can (Guo et al., 2020).

Remember, you can always ask questions to try to clear up issues or obstacles, as well. This can consist of checking with your peers, asking someone in an authority position for more clarity or guidance on a task, and even consulting outside sources (books, internet, other resources, etc.) for more information and knowledge (Chiang & Lee, 2016).

Testing Your Problem Solving Skills

Problem Solving Activity

Projects are a good way to test your problem solving skills while also letting you keep a physical souvenir from the lesson which you will be able to refer to later on.

Collaborating with others and getting help or insight from peers also helps with communication and team work skills.

For this session, our activity will be a group collage. Below are some examples of how you can format your collage or visual. You can use words, letters, or images. You can also utilize certain shapes and formats to get your point across better or do more abstract visuals, if you prefer.

The goal of the collage is to create a picture or visual that incorporates at least two themes or ideas from the previous sessions that you feel resonated most with you.

Think about how you want to present your visual (shape and layout) and why you chose the pictures that you did to represent the ideas you picked. Be sure to plan to explain how your pictures or layout connect with the ideas from our previous sessions.

There are magazines and glue for your use. Tear out whatever pictures you feel represent your ideas most accurately to the best of your ability and have fun!!!!

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Quality Improvement Feedback Questionnaire – Participant

Quality Improvement Feedback Questionnaire – College Readiness Skills Program - Participant Version

Please answer these questions regarding the day's session to the best of your ability.

1. How enjoyable was today's program session for you? Please circle your answer choice.

   1 – not enjoyable 2 – somewhat enjoyable 3 – enjoyable 4 – very enjoyable

2. Would you change anything about the session? (i.e. add a topic/activity or take away a topic/activity). Give a short explanation as to why you would like those changes.

3. Were there any part(s) of the session you really liked?

4. Do you feel the session was a good use of your time? Please circle your answer choice.

   No   Somewhat   Yes

5. Do you feel the content and activities will help you in your school/education experience? Please circle your answer choice.

   No   Somewhat   Yes

6. Do you feel that you learned anything new from today's session? If yes, please list one thing (activity, strategy, or topic) you learned.

   No   Somewhat   Yes

Appendix E

Quality Improvement Feedback Questionnaire – Faculty/Staff

Quality Improvement Feedback Questionnaire – College Readiness Skills Program – Faculty/Staff Version

Please answer these questions regarding the proposed program to the best of your ability.

7. How well do you feel this program is structured? Please circle your answer choice.

   1 – not well structured 2 – somewhat structured 3 – structured 4 – very well structured

8. Do you feel the program is a good use of the children's time? Please circle your answer choice.

   No   Somewhat   Yes

9. Do you feel that the content and activities within the program will be useful to the youth? Please circle your answer choice and indicate why or why not.

   No   Somewhat   Yes

10. What changes, if any would you make to the program/contents? (i.e. add a topic/activity or take away a topic/activity). Give a short explanation as to why you would propose those changes.

1. Do you feel that the program is able to be implemented into the facility effectively? Please indicate why or why not.

   No   Somewhat   Yes

Parental Consent Form

UNLV
PARENT PERMISSION FORM
Department of Brain Health

Title of Study: Developing a college readiness skills program aimed at improving self-efficacy for foster youth in academic settings

INVESTIGATOR(S): NATASA JANJUSIC

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-409-3343.

If you are conducting face-to-face procedures, please keep the statement in the box OR delete this entire section if you are not conducting face-to-face procedures

> *It is unknown as to the level of risk of transmission of COVID-19 if you decide for your child to participate in this research study. The research activities will utilize accepted guidance standards for mitigating the risks of COVID-19 transmission: however, the chance of transmission cannot be eliminated.*

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to introduce skills needed to succeed in higher education to adolescents in the foster care system and to determine the feasibility of the program at Bamboo Sunrise.

PARTICIPANTS

Your child is being asked to participate in the study because they are currently in the foster care system and are of appropriate age (early to late teens/adolescents) to be considering higher education opportunities.

PROCEDURES

If you allow your child to volunteer to participate in this study, your child will be asked to do the following:
- Attend a weekly session for a total of 4 weeks focusing on different gaining different skills that will be useful to utilize in college (or other higher education/academic settings).
    - Week 1: focus on introducing time management/organization skills
    - Week 2: focus on introducing mindfulness mental health strategies for coping with stress or anxiety
    - Week 3: focus on promoting problem-solving skills through project based team activities and Q&A panel with former foster youth currently in college.
- Fill out a questionnaire at the end of each weekly session that will ask them…
    - how well they enjoyed that week's session

- any changes they feel could have been made; what to add or take away from session
- what topics/activities, specifically, did they enjoy
- if they felt it was a good use of their time
- if they feel that they learned anything new
- if they felt contents/activities were applicable/relevant to an academic setting

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

There may be direct benefits to your child as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn if this program is developed well enough to be able to be implemented at Bamboo Sunrise long term in order to offer an educational attainment service to foster youth at the facility.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. Anticipated Risks:
- Participants may become uncomfortable about topics relating to education, their future, or their mental health when participating or talking about some activities within the program

COST /COMPENSATION

There will not be financial cost to your child to participate in this study. The study will take about 5 hours of your child's time. Your child will not be compensated for their time.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you or your child have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact the research student, Natasa Janjusic, at **702-409-3343.** For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-0020, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. Your child may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You or your child is encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link your child to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for a minimum of 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

.
Signature of Parent

.
Child's Name (Please print)

.
Parent Name (Please Print)

.
Date

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    effects of energy management strategies on occupational well-being. *Journal of*

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas   **May 2024 (expected)**
Occupational Therapy Doctorate

Capstone title: *Developing a College Readiness Skills Program Aimed at Improving Self-Efficacy of Foster Youth in Academic Settings.*
Adviser: Chih-Huang Yu, Ph.D., OTR/L
Determining the feasibility of a college readiness skills program at a local Las Vegas foster care agency.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas   **2020**
B.S. in Kinesiological Sciences

Related Work/Internship Experience

Hand Center of Nevada – OT Student Clinical Rotation, Level IIA   **May – Aug 2022**

Silver State Pediatric Skilled Nursing Facility – OT Student
Clinical Rotation, Level IIB   **May – Aug 2023**

Professional Affiliations

American Occupational Therapy Association   **2021 - present**

Honors and Awards:

Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship   **2016-2020**
(GGMS)

Community Service

Association of Pre-Health Professionals (APHP) – Club Member   2018 – 2020

Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) – Fundraising Committee   2022 – present
Volunteer and Fundraising Opportunities with APHP and SOTA

Pi Theta Epsilon (PTE) National Honor Society of Occupational Therapy   2023 – 2024
Treasurer

Manuscripts in Preparation

1. **Janjusic, Natasa**. *Developing a College Readiness Skills Program Aimed at Improving Self-Efficacy of Foster Youth in Academic Settings*